

# **INFLUENCE OF LOWERED EXPECTATIONS ON THE SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT OF LEARNERS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study investigated the negative impact of the low expectations of learners with hearing impairment on school engagement in Migori County, Kenya. The negative impact of the low expectations held for young learners with hearing impairment must be recognized for the purposes of fully engaging these learners in school. These low expectations, largely the result of negative perceptions that teachers, fellow students and society generally hold, are very likely to lead to poor motivation, self-esteem, and academic goals that, consequently, affect the learners' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement in school. The study was based on the Ecological Systems Theory and used a convergent mixed-methods research design. It targeted 1,469 learners with hearing impairment, teachers, and head teachers, and officers of the Educational Assessment and Resource Centre (EARC) and Sub-County Education from Special Schools and integrated Units in Migori County. Purposive sampling was used to select the relevant study participants. Data collection involved questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings indicated that school engagement of learners with hearing impairment was negatively impacted by low expectations. Learners with low learner expectations reported low motivation, low self-efficacy, and low engagement in school. Qualitative data reported poor learners' self-efficacy, low academic goals, and low engagement in school, which were the direct results of the low expectation. The study showed that school engagement of learners with hearing impairment is negatively impacted by the low expectations. It recommended addressing negative perceptions and low expectations associated with learners with hearing impairment by promoting positive attitudes and employing instructional practices that encourage high expectations, thereby improving their school engagement.

**Keywords:** *Lowered Expectations, School Engagement, Hearing Impairment, Inclusive Education, Learner Motivation, Educational Equity.*

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a human right, and a vital component of development and progress, socially, economically and personally. As debates on education continue, the focus has shifted to not just the availability of education, but the participation and involvement of potential learners: school engagement. This engagement, consisting of behavioral, emotional and cognitive involvement in education, is helpful in defining an individual's success in retention, efficacy and overall wellbeing (Fredricks et al., 2023; Wang & Eccles, 2022). Behavioral engagement is defined by participation in activities (both in and out of the classroom), emotional engagement is the attachment and belonging to the school and cognitive engagement relates to the willingness to undertake the learning tasks and activities involved. Competency-Based Education (CBE) systems, like that of Kenya, emphasize the importance of a teaching and learning approach that instills and nurtures skills like collaboration, communication and creativity through active involvement. Highlighting the importance of involvement in the education process, engagement has continued to be prioritized in assessing successful learning and development (Ministry of Education, 2023). Nonetheless, participation and engagement in educational activities is not uniform. Differences persist among individuals with disabilities, and more so, those with hearing impairment.

The barriers faced by individuals with hearing impairments on a global scale, particularly in regard to their access to education, are many. An example of this is that according to the statistics published by the World Health Organization in 2026, of the disabled population that is more than 430 million, more than a million of them are school aged children. The impact of hearing impairment on the development of language and communication skills and on social and educational activities has an impact on the ability of school aged children with hearing impairments to participate in the full range of activities available to them in schools. Even in situations where there are policies that promote inclusive education, children with hearing impairments continue to face negative experiences in education that are related to the barriers to communication and the inadequate instructional scaffolding and negative social attitudes toward them (Susilawati et al., 2023; Antia & Kreimeyer, 2022).

In addition to the barriers that pertain to instructional delivery and the education system, the socio-cultural determinants of hearing impairment have also an influence on educational participation and social engagement. Among the socio-cultural determinants that identify hearing impairment are the social or institutional cultural attitudes and beliefs to persons with disabilities. These cultural attitudes create barriers in education that are associated with prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination against persons with disabilities (Nieminen, 2023). In learning environments these cultural attitudes create barriers in education that are associated with poor educational attainment and poor educational participation for persons with disabilities (Sharma et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2024).

One of the key examples of how cultural stereotyping manifests in education is in the form of lowered expectations. This concept refers to educators underestimating the educational potential of their students as a result of their students' status in the area of disability. For students who are deaf or hard of hearing, as a result of their disability, educators may believe that they may be unable to accomplish the same level of success in the classroom as their hearing peers, or that they may be unable to actively engage in the various learning processes that occur during the instructional activities. This may influence educators to make learning activities and tasks easier,

less complex and challenging, expose the students to a limited number of learning and participation opportunities, and provide a low level of challenge in the learning process.

This can adversely affect the self-worth, self-image, and self-esteem of deaf and hard of hearing students. When students internalize the belief that they are incapable of succeeding, their will, self-efficacy, and confidence to participate in the learning process diminishes. This can adversely affect classroom and academic engagement, as they may withdraw from classroom participation; emotional engagement, as they may develop feelings of alienation; and cognitive engagement, as they may exhibit reduced effort and persistence in academic tasks. Because of this, lowered expectations foster a disengagement cycle that adversely impacts the education process.

The effect of expectations on learner outcomes is well-documented in the literature. For example, studies have found that the expectations held by teachers affect learners' academic motivation, performance, self-concept, and aspirations. Exposure to high expectations is likely to result in better academic performance and higher levels of academic engagement, while low expectations are likely to result in a loss of motivation and academic disengagement. When analyzing these dynamics in the context of disability, the situation becomes more pronounced as learners with hearing impairment are more likely to be viewed as having a deficit, as opposed to being viewed as having potential.

In Kenya, the Basic Education Act (2013), the Special Needs Education Policy Framework and the Competency-Based Curriculum have strengthened the promotion of policy frameworks for inclusive education. Equity, participation and learner-centered methods that provide a better outcome for all, including those with disabilities, are the key elements of these frameworks (Ministry of Education, 2023). Nevertheless, despite the policies, learners with hearing impairment face attitude and perception challenges in school. Research conducted in Kenya shows that the negative perceptions of society, lack of awareness of the needs of disability, and the unpreparedness of teachers impact the quality of inclusion for learners with hearing impairment in Kenya (Odhiambo et al., 2024; Wanjohi & Mugo, 2023). In Kenya's Lake Region, the postulation of school engagement levels through the analysis of school participation and performance of learners with hearing impairment suggests there are school engagement gaps. The difference may be caused by the socio-cultural contexts that determine the perception and treatment of disability in schools. Because of the existence of varied cultural practices and strong traditional beliefs that may shape perception of disability and participation in education, Migori County provides the best context to study this.

Though there are studies that have looked into the practices of inclusive education, the attitude of teachers, and the communication barriers to learners with hearing impairment, very few studies have examined the implications of lowered expectation on school engagement, and particularly in culturally diverse and rural contexts like Migori County. There is thus a dearth of knowledge on the implications of lowered expectations on learner's emotional, behavioral and cognitive school engagement. This study, therefore, intends to fill this gap by examining the implications of lowered expectations on school engagement of learners with hearing impairment in Migori County, Kenya. The study aims to provide evidence that will promote the employment of inclusive educational practices, enhance teacher awareness and form the basis for the intervention on the engagement of learners with hearing impairment at a level that is both high and constructive.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The educational experience of learners with hearing impairment is affected by social and educational barriers. One of these barriers is known as lowered expectations. This barrier consists of the underestimations of the academic abilities of learners with hearing impairment by teachers, parents, peers, and society as a whole. Typically, the underestimation of learners with hearing impairment generates lowered expectations. Specifically, learners with hearing impairment are more likely to experience issues with motivation and school engagement because of the constant underestimations. There are many definitions of school engagement; however, the most commonly accepted definition is the participation of a learner in the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of the learning process. Research suggests that school engagement is one of the most important factors for academic success and for the development of a learner.

The current study utilizes Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to explain how school engagement is affected by various social and educational barriers. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, a learner's development is influenced by the cultural attitudes and educational policies that exist within society. Using Bronfenbrenner's Theory, lowered expectations for learners with hearing impairment can be seen as a result of limited teacher readiness and a lack of institutional support. Bronfenbrenner's Theory is useful in explaining the social and educational barriers that affect the cognitive and emotional school engagement of learners. Empirical studies have shown evidence that the outlooks of significant individuals have an influential effect on the formation of educational experiences. Cawthon et al. (2022), in the USA, indicated that the academic participation of deaf and hard of hearing individuals was highly influenced by the expectations of their teachers. It was found that strong expectation levels encouraged participation in the classroom and persistence in the completion of academic tasks, while weak expectation levels were found to encourage a lack of motivation and an absence of desire for school. It was also found that the thinking of the teachers of deaf and hard of hearing individuals was that the individuals had little academic potential and, as a result, simplified the level of academic instructions and reduced opportunities for self-learning, which ultimately restricted academic potential and engagement.

In the UK, it was noted by Knox and Marschark (2021) that pessimistic thinking with regard to the abilities of deaf individuals resulted in a restricted outlook on education and a lack of desire to participate in classroom activities. It was also noted by Hyde and Punch (2021) that weak teacher and parent expectations were negatively associated with the self-efficacy of the learners and resulted in a lack of participation in academic activities and co-curricular activities. Globally, an example of this lack of educational expectation was included in the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) as he considered that a major obstacle to inclusive education was that learners with disabilities were offered limited opportunities to learn. The World Health Organization (2022) similarly noted that assumptions of disability result in a restricted participation in education which ultimately results in unfavorable educational outcomes.

Cultural attitudes and limited knowledge have an impact on attitudes toward learners with disabilities throughout Africa. Donohue and Bornman (2021) argued that insufficient preservice training in South Africa led teachers to have low expectations of learners and increased barriers to participation in the classroom. Mokomane and Mukhopadhyay (2023) claimed that low expectations resulted in South African learners feeling inferior and having low emotional attachment to schools. Agbenyega and Klibthong (2021) described the formation of negative,

deficit models in Ghana as an explanation for the limited participation and low motivation of learners. Oghosa (2025) reported that negative perceptions of hearing-impaired learners in Nigeria led to poor teaching and low academic engagement.

Across East Africa, the situation is similar. In Tanzania, Kisanji and Saanane (2021) maintained that hearing-impaired learners are thought to be incapable of achieving academic success, which leads to low participation. In Uganda, Nambi and Muwagga (2021) and Ssewanyana et al. (2022) argued that societal perceptions combined with poor preparation of teachers, resulted in low expectations and poor participation in school. In Kenya, Mweru and Kimamo (2021) reported that low expectations of teachers resulted in poor participation and teaching, while Wanjohi and Kiarie (2021) found that learners who had been exposed to low expectations had a poor emotional attachment to school. Applying Ecological Systems Theory, research shows that engagement levels are impacted by interactions at the different ecological systems. For example, macrosystem-level cultural norms create a consistent set of stereotypes that inform attitudes at the microsystem level (e.g. teachers) and, coupled with exosystem-level institutional norms that are not designed to counteract such attitudes, excludes learners, and leads to a lack of engagement. Such exclusion typically results in a reduced level of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement in learning among learners with hearing impairments.

The local evidence available from Migori County shows that learners with disabilities are directly discriminated against based on perceived social constructs of their capabilities (Anyango & Odundo, 2022). According to Ogutu and Nyaundi (2023), negative attitudes and a lack of adequate systems and structures cause reduced engagement in learning, both in and outside the classroom. Conversely, the existence of adequate and supportive systems and structures increases engagement and the desire to participate in school. While there are very few studies examining the relationship between the diminished engagement of learners with hearing impairments in school and the various systems from which engagement may be derived, the studies that have been conducted have shown the vast negative impact that diminished expectations have on hearing-impaired learners' engagement with school.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Design*

The study utilized a convergent mixed-methods research design. This design helped the researcher quantify the effects of reduced expectations on school participation of hearing-impaired students and helped the researcher obtain elaborate qualitative data from the main stakeholders. The presence of both data types complemented the triangulation and enhanced the data validity.

### *Target Population*

The study's target population was 1,469 respondents from special and integrated schools in Migori County, Kenya. This population included hearing-impaired learners, teachers, and headteachers, as well as Educational Assessment and Resource Centre (EARC) and Sub-County Education Officers. The surveyed participants were hearing-impaired students in Grades 7–9, as these students have the cognitive ability to articulate and reflect on their educational concerns on engagement and expectations.

### *Sampling Techniques and Sample Size*

The study purposed schools and participants who had the experience and knowledge pertaining to learners who are hearing impaired. This involved participants who were learners, teachers, and administrators. Learner participants among the sampled schools were selected through a simple random technique to eliminate bias. Some forms of sampling were also used. For instance, stratified sampling was used. The total sample consisted of 396 learners who were hearing impaired, 74 teachers who taught hearing impaired learners, 7 institutional heads, and 5 EARC officers, thus the total number of respondents was 482.

### *Research Instruments*

Instruments used for data collection were the Learners' Questionnaire, Interview guides, and the FGD guide. The Learners' Questionnaire collected quantitative data on lowered expectations and school engagement. Interview guides were administered to headteachers and EARC officers to obtain qualitative insights, while the FGD guide was administered to sample teachers and was used to collect data on lowered expectations, learner engagement and teaching.

### *Validity and Reliability of Instruments*

To ensure experts reviewed the instruments for clarity, relevance, and adequacy in addressing the objectives of the studies, the supervisors and specialists in Special Needs Education provided feedback. A pilot study occurred in a similar area to the study. The purpose of the pilot study was to identify and remove confusion and refine the tools. Two weeks later, the same group completed the instruments again. The reliability of the instruments was determined using the test-retest method. The test-retest method resulted in a Pearson correlation reliability coefficient of 0.71 for the internal consistency of the instruments.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

An introductory letter and research authorization were obtained from the university and the educational authorities. Data collection commenced after obtaining permission from the school administrators. Hearing impaired learners were the main targets of the research, and questionnaires were given to them through the support of trained interpreters in sign language. Interviews and focus group discussions were done at the most convenient time to avoid school interruptions. In the entirety of the study, participants' rights to privacy and the principle of informed consent were upheld.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

For the current study, the SPSS data editor was used to analyze quantitative data. Descriptive statistics of frequency, percentages, means and standard deviations were computed. Lowered expectations and school engagement were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression statistics. Qualitative data, which consisted of data from interviews and FGDs, were subjected to thematic analysis. This involved transcribing the data, and coding and organizing the codes into themes related to the objectives of the study. The interpretation of the study results was based on both quantitative and qualitative data.

### *Ethical Considerations*

This study observed high ethical standards. Necessary approvals and clearances were obtained from relevant authorities. Research permits were also obtained. The use of informed consents was

observed among all the sample population. For the minors, informed assent was obtained. The respondents had the freedom of choice to withdraw their participation towards any point during the study. Their identities were protected through the use of coding, and the participants' confidentiality was maintained. The purpose of this study was to observe respect for the participants, especially those learners with hearing impairment. Various other communication methods were employed to collect the data from learners with hearing impairments. To keep the data collection non-discriminatory, a safe environment was provided.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study sampled 396 participants with hearing impairment. 212 (53.5%) of participants were identified as male and 184 (46.5%) as female. In regards to grade, study participants were classified as follows; 165 (34.2%) Grade 7, 162 (33.6%) Grade 8 and 155 (32.2%) Grade 9. Distribution of participants according to school type shows that 287 (59.5%) were in special schools and 195 (40.5%) in integrated schools. The distribution of participants was representative of the various educational settings in Migori County.

**Table 1: Influence of Lowered Expectations on the school engagement**

Influence of lowered expectations on the school engagement of learners with Hearing Impairment	R	RATINGS					Mean	SD
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
		1	2	3	4	5		
Teachers expect less academic performance due to HI	%	2.5	3.8	6.3	43.7	43.7	4.20	0.92
	F	10	15	25	173	173		
Learners are given easier tasks than they can handle	%	3.0	4.5	5.8	42.4	44.2	4.20	0.95
	F	12	18	23	168	175		
Learners are rarely encouraged to challenge themselves	%	2.0	4.0	7.3	45.7	41.0	4.19	0.89
	F	8	16	29	181	162		
Low expectations reduce interest in learning	%	1.8	3.8	8.3	44.7	41.4	4.21	0.88
	F	7	15	33	177	164		
Confidence is affected by how others view abilities	%	2.0	3.0	6.6	45.2	43.2	4.24	0.87
	F	8	12	26	179	171		

**Key:** SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree; F = Frequency

The data presented in Table 1 suggest that expectations of students with hearing impairments in educational environments are multiple and varied (with mean scores being notably high across all response items). They suggest that students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement is heavily influenced by the perceptions of educators and stakeholders. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's

Ecological Systems Theory, development is a product of interacting systems, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. In the context of education, the expectations of teachers, parents, peers and society are primary elements of the systems that shape engagement and participation. On the claim that teachers have low expectations of hearing impaired students' academic performance, most respondents (87.4%) agreed or strongly agreed, leading to the high mean score of 4.22 (SD = 0.92). This illustrates the perception of students that teachers hold lower academic expectations of them due to their disability. Again, using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, teachers are part of students' microsystem. The nature of engagements in this system strongly influences development and education. If teachers have low expectations of students, this negatively impacts students' academic self-concept and motivation.

These findings align with Cawthon et al.'s (2022) conclusions about the impact of teacher expectations on deaf and hard of hearing students' academic engagement and persistence. Students with high expectations showed more commitment and participation in class activities, while students with low expectations showed less. Also, Marschark et al. (2023) noted that teachers who had low expectations for students with hearing impairments oversimplified their teaching and reduced the academic requirements, which restricted students' opportunities to participate meaningfully and to develop cognitively. In the UK, Hyde and Punch (2021) reported that negative beliefs about deaf students' capabilities led to decreased self-efficacy and lower educational aspirations. The findings also support UNESCO (2023), which stated that persistently low expectations are among the main factors blocking inclusive education and that students with disabilities cannot compete with their peers. Teacher expectations are still a very influential factor concerning the levels of engagement with education of students with hearing impairments.

The findings revealed that 86.6% of respondents agreed that they were given tasks that were easier than what they were capable of completing. This resulted in a mean of 4.20 (SD = 0.95). This data suggests that there is a tendency to simplify instructions to individuals who are hearing impaired. Although there may be an intention to provide assistance, practices like these convey messages of dependence and lack of ability. Within the framework of the Ecological Systems Theory, these practices are located in the microsystem, but may be interlinked to the exosystem through insufficient teacher training or a lack of support in developing goals of high expectations within the system.

These findings were consistent with the findings of Marschark et al. (2023), where it was noted that hearing-impaired learners were not afforded the opportunity to learn through self-initiated learning as it was presumed they were not capable of dealing with challenges. Furthermore, in South Africa, Donohue and Bornman (2021) noted that low expectations for persons with disabilities and little to no academic challenge to disabled learners resulted from insufficient training of teachers. In Ghana, Agbenyega and Klibthong (2021) noted that educators and parents emphasized what learners cannot do as opposed to what they are able to do. The World Health Organization (2022) indicates that societal attitudes of viewing disability as a deficit result in a disengagement of persons with a disability, and creates a barrier to learning. It is evident, that simplifying the tasks for individuals who are hearing impaired, may unintentionally limit their cognitive engagement and learning.

The data revealed limited academic encouragement and diminished motivation, as 86.7% of respondents reported that they were 'rarely' or 'never' encouraged to challenge themselves academically (M = 4.19, SD = 0.89). According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory,

such factors correspond to the mesosystem, which includes the interaction of school and family and their combined influence on a learner's self-confidence and aspirations, especially when expectations are low across the different contexts.

Results are reflective of Hyde and Punch (2021), who reported that the low expectations of teachers and parents negatively impact the self-efficacy and educational aspirations of deaf learners. Knoors and Marschark (2021) also reported that the low expectations of learners is correlated with low levels of commitment and participation. Within the Ugandan context, Nambi and Muwagga (2021) reported that the prevailing attitudes toward disability in society set low expectations for educators and parents, which results in low levels of engagement and emotional investment in education. Ssewanyana et al. (2022) examined the barriers to participation for learners with disabilities and identified limited teacher preparation and a lack of understanding of disabilities as contributing factors. Low expectations and limited encouragement result in low engagement and a lack of persistence toward learning.

The results showed that 86.1% of the participants thought or strongly thought that low expectations diminish their participation in the learning process, with a mean of 4.21 and a standard deviation of 0.88. This indicates that those learners who believe that nothing is expected from them, lose their motivation and interest in learning. Bronfenbrenner's theory indicates that in the macrosystem, with the help of the attitudes and beliefs of the society and the culture, one can analyze the relationships prevailing in the schools and the families. It is possible then that the negative cultural attitudes toward the disabled will affect the motivation and the engagement of the students in the school and the expectations given to the students.

These results are in line with the findings of Wang and Eccles (2022), in that the expectations directly influence the students' motivation and school engagement. Likewise, Mokomane and Mukhopadhyay (2023), indicated that low expectations of the peers and the teachers were the main contributors of the sense of inferiority and poor emotional involvement in the school of the disabled learners. Oghosa (2025) reported that in Nigeria, beliefs about the low intellectual capabilities of learners with hearing impairments were found to affect their academic aspirations and poor participation in school. Finally, UNICEF (2023), stated that in order to address the barriers to school engagement, expectations of low participation must be addressed, given the poor participation and reduced motivation and engagement. The findings of the current research emphasize that low expectations are likely to result in poor engagement and participation in the learning process.

The response with the strongest mean score asked about the influence of opinion on confidence. Of the sample, 88.4% per the statement. The mean score was 4.24 (SD = 0.87). From the results, the individuals surveyed are sensitive to teacher, peer, and community perceptions. Based on the Ecological Systems Theory, perceptions operating on the macrosystem shape interactions in the microsystem and thus the emotional and self-development of an individual. Therefore perceptions of disability in the community shape the interaction in the classroom, which in turn shapes the self-confidence and the active involvement of the learners in the classroom.

The results are in harmony with Lindsay et al. (2022) who postulated that stigmatization of disability negatively impacts the self-confidence and the participation of able individuals. Hyde and Punch (2021) argued that consistently poor expectations lead to feelings of self-worthlessness and low self-esteem. Within the context of Kenya, Mweru and Kimamo (2021) posited that the expectations of a teacher have a direct relation to the motivation and active classroom participation

of the learner, with low expectations linked to poor participation and motivational outcomes. Wanjohi and Kiarie (2021) posited that expectations of learners with hearing impairment that are low lead to withdrawal from participation in classroom activities and extracurricular activities. Low expectations also negatively shape the sense of belonging of learners in the classroom as noted by UNESCO (2023).

The research indicates that diminished expectations lead to negative impacts on behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, these expectations are the result of interlinked systems, such as families, schools, communities, institutions, and the prevailing beliefs in the culture. Therefore, in order to improve the engagement of learners who are hearing impaired, it is necessary to have multiple interventions, including improved classroom conditions, enhanced teacher preparation, positive social attitudes to disability, and improved partnerships between schools and the family and the community.

**Table 2: Correlation between Lowered Expectations and School Engagement**

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Lowered Expectations and School Engagement	-0.647	.000

A negative and significant association was found between lowered expectations and school engagement ( $r = -0.647, p < .001$ ). Put simply, the more the lowered expectations are perceived, the more school engagement is negatively impacted. It can therefore be concluded that learners who perceive a lack of confidence by teachers and learners, as well as other important people, are less likely to participate in school. Learners are therefore less likely to show engagement in both social and school activities, as well as exhibit cognitive participation in school and learning. The findings are consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in that they describe how the various systems in the environment affect the development of the learner. The microsystem has a direct influence on the self-concept and motivation of the learner, and because of negative expectations, there is a greater chance of a learner demonstrating disengagement from school as a result of the negative attitudes and expectations that permeate from the surrounding and distal environments.

The findings are consistent with the conclusions of Wang and Eccles (2022), who wrote that the expectations of significant others affect the engagement of learners. Cawthon et al. (2022) also concluded that high expectations, especially of deaf learners, facilitate engagement and school participation, whereas low expectations are disengaging. Finally, Hyde and Punch (2021) concluded that learners who have persistent exposure to low expectations have school engagement that is adversely affected. This was backed by one Head of Institution

Most teachers do not intentionally treat students with hearing impairment discriminately. However, as they believe that these students are not able to achieve the same level as the other students, they tend to relax their academic requirements. Over time, students become disinterested in participating in class and begin to have low self-esteem regarding their abilities. [HOI 2]

This shows that the expectations which are generally communicated by the school to the students have serious effects on student engagement and participation in the teaching and learning process.

**Table 3: Model Summary**

<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Std. Error of Estimate</b>
.712	.507	.501	.661

The results show that lowered expectations accounted for 50.7% of variance in school engagement ( $R^2 = .507$ ). This demonstrates that expectations are a key determinant of learners' engagement and explain a significant amount of variance in behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation.

**Table 4: ANOVA Results**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Regression	162.45	1	162.45	372.18	.000
Residual	157.88	394	.401		
Total	320.33	395			

There was a statistically significant regression ( $F(3, 96) = 372.18, p < 0.001$ ), showing that lowering expectations significantly predicts engaging in school for learners with hearing impairment.

**Table 5: Regression Coefficients**

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Constant	5.103	.214	—	23.85	.000
Lowered Expectations	-0.615	.032	-0.712	-19.29	.000

The regression coefficient ( $\beta = -0.712, p < .001$ ) shows that decreased expectations have a strong negative impact on school engagement. More decreased expectations mean less engagement from learners. Using the Ecological Systems Theory, the data shows that all levels of the environment from the microsystem to the macrosystem combine to form the school environment. Culturally negative attitudes and stereotypes of disability can affect teaching styles and family attitudes on how involved the learners will be.

The data of this study is similar to the study done by Mweru and Kimamo (2021), where they showed that teacher expectations have an effect on learner motivation and participation in Kenya, and to the study of Marschark et al. (2023), where they showed that the underestimation of learners with hearing impairment leads to a lack of opportunities for learners to engage in learning and becomes a contributing factor to their lack of cognitive engagement. UNESCO (2023) also argues that low expectations are one of the most significant barriers to inclusive education and that they deny learners with disabilities the opportunities to show their potential. An EARC officer said the following:

Many learners with hearing impairments may have the ability to do much more than people generally think. Because the general attitude toward hearing impaired learners is to expect little from them, some teachers set their expectations lower and provide fewer opportunities for learners to participate in and assume leadership roles. This impacts learners' confidence and willingness to take part in activities. [EARC 1]

Similar sentiments were expressed by one of the teachers:

Learners who are given the repeated message that they are unable to achieve much begin to internalize that message. They are less likely to answer, participate or take on leadership positions because they are afraid of failing and being rejected. [Teacher 2]

The results indicate that lower expectations are a significant obstacle to class engagement for learners with hearing impairment. The results showed a strong, significant, and negative relationship between school's low expectations of learners with hearing impairment and engagement in school activities, as reflected in low participation, lower academic expectations, and low confidence.

Lindsay et al. (2022) support these findings by asserting that lower levels of school participation among persons with disabilities is related to higher levels of disability-related social stigma, while Mokomane and Mukhopadhyay (2023) maintain that lower levels of school participation are the result of lower expectations among educators and peers, and persons with disabilities feel inferior; thus, their emotional attachment to school is lower. Oghosa (2025) confirmed that negative attitudes toward learners with hearing impairment within society lower their academic aspirations and involvement in school.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory argues that the findings show learner engagement is the result of multiple, interrelated, ecological systems. Different expectations from teachers, families, peers, schools, and society interact with the learner's self-concept, motivation, and level of engagement. As a result, improving the engagement of learners with hearing impairments will require changes in the attitudes and the culture of different systems that maintain low expectations. The findings show that decreased expectations negatively impact the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement of learners with hearing impairments. Therefore, establishing an environment of positive expectations and flexibly supportive policies within schools will have the greatest impact on meaningful engagement and improved learning.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study determined that having low expectations adversely affects school engagement for hearing impaired students in Migori County, Kenya. Quantitatively, lower expectations and school engagement formed a strong negative correlation ( $r = -0.647$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and were statistically significant in a regression model. According to the participants, teachers and school staff had low expectations and as a result students were given simplified tasks that offered little cognitive challenge, which diminished the child's confidence and induced the child to withdraw from participation. Both teachers and education officers agreed that such practices instil dependency and complacency and that they inhibit engagement. Using Ecological Systems Theory, it was argued that low expectations create a negative context that, at the classroom, school and community level, cumulatively constrains the educational engagement of learners with hearing impairment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of Education and Teachers Service Commission should improve their professional development programs and offer courses that include training teachers on how to have a positive outlook for hearing impaired students and how to practice differentiated instruction in a way that is academically challenging and provides opportunities for students to participate in the classroom. School administrators should provide frequent workshops to staff, students, and parents to challenge their misconceptions and provide low expectations, to promote students' involvement in classroom activities, and encourage students' participation in leadership roles and extracurricular activities. Professional partnerships between schools, Educational Assessment and Resource Centres (EARCs), and families should be strengthened for sustained support and monitoring of students. Inclusive education policies should be strengthened by building more compliance frameworks to prevent negative beliefs and create positive attitudes towards students with disabilities.

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